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UNITED STATES ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AGENCY

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MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF PRINCIPALS

Wednesday, April 17, 1963, at 4:00 p.m.  
Secretary of State's Conference Room

ACTIONS TAKEN ON AGENDA ITEMS

1. Explosions for Peaceful Uses

The Committee decided that Annex II (Explosions for Peaceful Uses) of the draft nuclear test ban treaty of March 23, 1963, should be re-examined to determine whether any means could be found to avoid disclosure of the designs of nuclear devices used in the Plowshare Program. ACDA is undertaking this review in consultation with AEC and other interested agencies.

2. General discussion of the adequacy of the text and the timing of the tabling of the test ban treaty at Geneva

The consensus of the meeting was that the text was adequate and that a test ban treaty was still in the national interest of the United States. General Taylor entered a reservation concerning the absence of a seismic threshold in the test ban treaty. It was the consensus that there was no immediate need to table the draft treaty in Geneva in view of the current negotiating situation.

State Dept. review completed

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ADDITIONAL POINTS OF INTEREST

1. It was agreed that a principal counselor from each of the agencies would meet to discuss the problems concerning presentation of the Administration's position on a test ban before Congressional committees.

2. It was agreed that the treaty would be examined to see whether treaty language could be drafted which would exclude states not now possessing nuclear weapons from detonating nuclear weapons under the guise of a Plowshare program.

3. Secretary Rusk expressed the hope that the United States was not being held back in its planning and preparations for future nuclear weapons tests by the fact that negotiations for a nuclear test ban treaty were underway.

4. Secretary McNamara and Chairman Seaborg agreed that weapons effects tests required emphasis in planning for future nuclear test explosions; Chairman Seaborg thought there might be some value in establishing a weapons effects laboratory. Chairman Seaborg and Secretary McNamara agreed that it would be helpful to establish a budget and a date for a future atmospheric nuclear test series.

5. Chairman Seaborg stated that AEC felt that Christmas Island was vastly superior to Johnston Island as a site for nuclear test operations in the Pacific.

6. In response to Mr. Foster's question about keeping weapons laboratories active during a test ban, Chairman Seaborg thought that a great deal could be done and referred to a memorandum which he had written on this subject.

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UNITED STATES ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AGENCY

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DATE: April 17, 1963  
4:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Nuclear Test Ban Treaty  
Meeting of Committee of Principals

PARTICIPANTS: See attached list

COPIES TO: See attached list

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Mr. Foster commented that he had circulated a list of amendments to the draft test ban treaty of March 23 and he gathered that these changes had been generally accepted. There had been one further amendment suggested by Dr. Wiesner to make it clear that additions to the list of manned seismic stations could be made without the unanimous consent of the permanent members. This was acceptable in principle to ACDA and treaty language would be drafted to take care of this point. The only remaining unresolved issue related to the conditions under which nuclear explosions for peaceful uses would be carried out.

Secretary Rusk then remarked that the present discussion, he assumed, was based on a continuation of the policy attitude that a test ban treaty was in the interest of the United States. He felt that from time to time the Principals should pause and ask themselves whether there was any change in that underlying premise. The Secretary observed that there was no reason to think that the Soviet Government was trying very hard to get a test ban treaty at the present time. There were perhaps two reasons for this. The first might be related to the recent Soviet decision to step up its nuclear rearmament; the second might relate to Soviet attitudes towards Communist China. Despite this apparent lack of Soviet interest the Secretary presumed that the US should continue to work at getting a satisfactory test ban treaty.

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Secretary McNamara replied that while the Joint Chiefs of Staff had always had questions about the test ban treaty, especially over the absence of a threshold and the possibility of undetected tests by the Soviet Union, he knew of no evidence which had turned up in the last 90 days which would change the basic US attitude towards a test ban treaty. He continued to think that the risk to the United States without a test ban treaty was greater than with a test ban treaty. The present situation called more for a reassessment of tactics, especially regarding public statements. It was questionable whether it was in the national interest to do as much public talking as we do about the test ban question. The result, he felt, was that Congressional opposition to a test ban treaty was mounting.

General Taylor said that the Joint Chiefs of Staff believed that a treaty without a seismic threshold would be unsatisfactory and would not be conducive to the promotion of the national interest. He was not certain whether the President had taken a final decision on these matters and, of course, did not intend to take issue with decisions already made.

Referring to Secretary McNamara's comment about public statements Mr. Foster said that he believed that criticism of the Administration's position on a test ban certainly could not go unanswered. As people understood our position better, they were more ready to stand up and be counted in favor of the Administration's efforts to secure a treaty. Referring to General Taylor's mention of the threshold, Mr. Foster said the advantage of the present treaty was that the Soviets could not know just what the threshold was and would consequently have to be extremely cautious. At the same time, the treaty gave the United States the right of inspecting events of any seismic magnitude. These two factors constituted a powerful deterrent against cheating in the low yield ranges.

Secretary Rusk commented that the extent of the public discussion of the test ban issue so far had succeeded in identifying the range of issues which were up for debate. The fight should be made, however, for an agreement which was concrete and not hypothetical. Mr. McCone agreed, adding that the number of influential people against a treaty would be fewer if there were a completed instrument before the Senate.

Secretary Rusk went on to say that while we should not stop talking about the test ban question, we should stay within the present position we have and not get into the field of conjecture.

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In some degree, those who were currently opposed to the efforts to secure a test ban treaty took this position because they felt the US had been trying too hard. This was more a criticism of technique than of substance.

Mr. Foster then raised the problem of presenting a common Administration viewpoint to the Congress. Secretary McNamara agreed that we should not let the record get distorted. Dr. Wiesner added that what was needed was testimony from people who could speak from the broad perspective. Secretary Rusk agreed with this and noted that the staff level witnesses before Congress were simply not competent to pass judgment on the basic questions of national security which were involved in the test ban issue. He suggested that there was a need for better organization in presenting the Administration's viewpoint. Mr. Bundy agreed and said that he would like to meet with a principal counselor from each of the agencies to discuss this problem. This was agreed.

Dr. Kaysen noted that part of the problem of presenting the case for a test ban was that there was so much uninformed comment about it. He wondered if it would be possible to get into the public domain a comparison of where the US and USSR stood in their respective nuclear weapons programs. Mr. McCone said that this was being examined but that this was naturally an extremely sensitive subject. Secretary Rusk also cautioned against the hazard of being dragged into divulging more information than was really necessary or desirable. He concluded that what was really involved in the present discussion was what the President says to Congress about a major problem of policy. Any Executive Branch witness before Congress must in all honesty describe what the problems are and how they are being taken into account. There is an obligation to explain why the course that is being taken is the course of wisdom. But the President could not speak to Congress through the medium of a debate among people who worked for him. Responsible people would have to go to Congress to present a balanced picture.

Turning to the question of the annex on explosions for peaceful purposes, Mr. Foster noted that AEC felt the present provisions of that annex would inhibit the Plowshare program in a very serious way. Mr. Foster also noted that the purpose of discussing this subject in the Committee of Principals was not related to any desire to have a draft treaty tabled in the immediate future but was rather related to the need to have an agreed draft which could be used as necessary. The feeling in ACDA, which he understood was shared by Secretary Rusk, was that

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this was not the time to table a test ban treaty. ACDA felt that the treaty should not be put forward until there was some sign that this would do some good in the negotiations.

Chairman Seaborg then reviewed the Plowshare program. He stated that there were two reasons for bringing this matter to the attention of the Principals. First, there were many very useful projects which could be accomplished by the use of nuclear explosions and which could not be accomplished in any other way or only at a much greater expense. There were literally dozens of projects of this nature which had come up in the past few years. The potential of this program had expanded beyond what he had earlier envisaged. Second, it had to be recognized that not very much could be accomplished in the Plowshare program under the present draft treaty annex. The revelation of the designs of nuclear explosive devices would mean that only very obsolete gun-type devices could be used in the program. Consequently, the AEC, on the assumption that the US would want to make progress in the Plowshare program, had examined various possibilities for safeguarding this program from misuse. The idea which appealed most to the AEC was that of an agreement on a limit, say 50 kilotons, on the yield of any Plowshare explosion and on a limit, say five or six or perhaps even three or four, explosions which could be carried out in any one year. The AEC could accept all of the present Annex II except for one sentence which called for both internal and external inspection of devices used in the Plowshare program. In order to conduct a successful Plowshare program it would be necessary to use the most advanced clean devices and these could not be shown to the Soviet Union. We now were within reach of devices which would be suitable for carrying out the wide variety of projects contemplated under the Plowshare program. Chairman Seaborg added that he was fully aware of the difficulties inherent in this suggestion; the Soviets obviously could use this as a means of conducting weapons experiments. Dr. Wiesner stated that experiments of the kind contemplated almost certainly would contribute to weapons development. Concerning the attitude of Congress towards the AEC plan, Chairman Seaborg felt that it would be difficult to obtain a law to permit revelation even of designs of obsolete devices. On the other hand there were many people in Congress who strongly supported the Plowshare program.

As an instance of one of the important projects which the present annex would eliminate, Chairman Seaborg mentioned that he had just learned within the hour that a Soviet scientist now visiting on the West Coast had stated that the Soviet Union had conducted an underground nuclear explosion for the purpose of

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discovering transuranic elements. The chances were extremely high that this would be the means by which the next transuranic elements would be discovered. At the present time, however, our most advanced devices did not yield a high enough neutron flux. This was the kind of experiment which he hoped could be conducted under the Plowshare program. In response to Secretary Rusk's request for other examples of the type of projects which would be carried out under this program, Chairman Seaborg mentioned the following examples: excavations, extracting oil from oil shales, mining, scientific experiments, a canal through the Isthmus of Panama, a harbor at Point Barrow, a canal across the Aleutian chain, and deepening of the Bering Straits. To develop the devices necessary to do such projects would require some years.

Mr. Foster said that he did not wish to pass on the technical points but he wished to note that there would be a problem in selling this idea to Congress and in negotiating it with the Soviet Union. If this program was as good as we thought it was, presumably the Soviet Union would also want to do it and would accept the unanimity provision of the treaty.

Mr. Nitze pointed out that signatories other than the three permanent members would also have the right to conduct explosions under this annex. He wondered whether this was in our interest. After some discussion it was agreed that this point would be examined to see whether a barrier to weapons development by Nth countries could be built into the treaty.

Dr. Wiesner observed that there was an inconsistency in saying that we would not worry about a few 50 kiloton thermonuclear explosions by the Soviet Union under guise of peaceful uses but that we were concerned about the possibility of undetected small yield underground tests. Moreover, the area of clean devices was the very area where weaponeers would like to test.

In response to a further question by Secretary Rusk, Chairman Seaborg said that by the time the treaty was signed he was hopeful that there would be advanced devices which could be used in the Plowshare program.

Dr. Wiesner thought that despite the attractive program outlined by Chairman Seaborg it was probable that we would have to put off this program in order to get a test ban treaty. Mr. McCone said that he felt that the elimination of the latitude we now have in conducting a Plowshare program could be a factor tending to inhibit Senate acceptance of a test ban treaty.

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Mr. Foster recalled that the provisions in the present annex were essentially the same as those contained in the draft treaty that we had tabled on April 18, 1961. Secretary Rusk said that the first question that would be asked of us in an international forum was whether the Plowshare proposal was really a proposal for a weapons development program. Chairman Seaborg thought that with the type of safeguards the AEC had in mind this question could be satisfactorily answered. Mr. McCone felt that it was not possible to have both a treaty and a Plowshare program. Secretary McNamara agreed with this but Chairman Seaborg felt this assessment was an overstatement because the type of safeguards proposed by AEC would go some distance towards allaying concern that we were proposing a weapons development program.

Mr. Nitze wondered if we could not postpone a decision on this. Should it become necessary to circulate a treaty text at an early date we could include a provision saying that explosions for peaceful purposes could be carried out either (1) with unanimous agreement of permanent parties or (2) in accordance with an annex which could be left for later negotiation. There was a parallel for this in the August 27 draft test ban treaty.

General Taylor asked whether deleting the sentence concerning revelation of external and internal design was an obstacle. Mr. McCone, Mr. Bundy, and Mr. Foster agreed that this would be a fatal obstacle in negotiations. Chairman Seaborg, however, said that he could not accept the idea that there would be no treaty if we took the route which he was suggesting.

Secretary Rusk then inquired whether inspection of surrounding instrumentation would tend to limit weapons development. Chairman Seaborg replied that it would. Secretary Rusk suggested, then, that we should further examine ways of limiting weapons development by means other than design disclosure, for example, by prohibiting diagnostic instrumentation. Mr. Foster agreed to look into this but thought it was like trying to marry the unmarriageable.

Secretary Rusk then commented that while there was surely a risk in a continuation of nuclear testing, there would be even more risk in having no treaty but in lagging in our nuclear weapons development. He hoped that no one was being held back in planning and preparing for nuclear weapons tests by the fact that we were negotiating for a test ban treaty. Secretary McNamara thought that more could be done and Chairman Seaborg agreed but said that Defense and AEC people were, in his opinion, doing

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an effective planning job. Secretary McNamara thought that weapons effects tests were probably the most important type of test but that not enough energy was being put into this. Chairman Seaborg replied that in this connection he felt there might be some value in establishing a weapons effects laboratory.

Mr. Foster then noted that at one time we had said that it was impossible to keep weapons laboratories active in the absence of testing but that we were now saying that this could be done. He wondered what the present thinking was on this question. Chairman Seaborg thought that a great deal could be done and referred to a memorandum that he had written on this subject.

Secretary Rusk said that it should be borne in mind that the Soviet Union is building up its armaments. Secretary McNamara thought that this could be consistent with a desire for a test ban treaty. The United States had much more fissionable material than the Soviet Union and the Soviet Union might wish to narrow this gap which of course could be done even without further nuclear testing.

Concerning preparations for further nuclear testing, Chairman Seaborg and Secretary McNamara agreed that there ought to be a date and a budget set for another nuclear test series. As to the location of an atmospheric series, Chairman Seaborg said he wanted it known that the AEC felt Christmas Island was vastly superior to Johnston Island for this purpose. Mr. Bundy said it was his impression that the AEC did not want to accept the kind of conditions that we were likely to have to accept if we used Christmas Island. In conclusion Mr. Foster said he believed he had secured the information he wanted about keeping laboratories active during a ban on nuclear testing.

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